

# DEVELOPMENT OF ASTORIA, 1811-1850

By Grace P. Morris in OHQ, Vol. 38, pages 413 to 424

Notes: Liisa Penner

From Alexander Ross and Franchere:

Astor's men search for a site

They examined both sides of the Columbia

Decided on the south side, on a small rising ground between Pt. George on west and Tongue Pt. on east, 12 miles from the mouth of the river.

Alexander Ross: Difficult site because:

1. Studded with gigantic trees some 50' in diameter
2. Huge rocks

Construction of buildings

1. Cleared the land
2. Day 4 planted potatoes and sewed garden seeds
3. May 16 laid foundations for first building
4. May 18 foundation finished; named it Astoria in honor of Astor
5. (Franchere says a pen was built soon after reaching the Columbia & put 50 hogs in it)

First buildings

1. A store house
2. A dwelling
3. Powder magazine

All three made of hewn logs and covered and roofed with cedar bark.

About middle of July, the Indians were said to be planning a raid on Astor's men in Astoria. Measures taken:

1. The dwelling house was raised
  2. Pickets were cut, placed in front and rear, ca. 90' x 120'
  3. Warehouse on the edge of the ravine formed one flank; the dwelling house and shops another
  4. A little bastion at each angle north and south with four small cannon
  5. Guard kept day and night
- All done in six days

Building material: Had no lime so used blue clay for mortar

Old Astoria History

During the first year a number of buildings were completed.

1. A dwelling house
2. Extensive warehouses for trading goods and furs
3. A provision store
4. A trading shop
5. Smith's forge
6. Carpenter's workshop

Robert Stuart describes establishment:

1. 75' x 80' area
2. Pickets 17' long, 18" in diameter
3. 2 strong bastions at opposite angles
4. Frame store 2 stories high, 60 x 30' with good cellars and powder magazine
5. Dwelling house 1 story high, 60' x 25'
6. A blacksmith's shop
7. Large shed for carpenters, coopers, etc.

In the coming winter, about 20 men will be employed in extending the fortification, and 30 now engaged in preparing a frame for a dwelling house 2 stories high and 60 by 30', with another store and kitchen

In August and September of 1812, a house 45 x 30 feet was finished. This was used as a hospital for the sick and a lodging house for the mechanics.

In 1812, 60 hogs came on the ship Beaver in 1812.

Then the Northwest Company took over

By March 1814 there were two goats there.

Peter Corney, first officer on the ship Columbia, described Fort George in Oct. Nov. 1817:

1. About 7 miles from Pt. Adams, south side of river
2. On a good bay, safe from the tide for ships
3. Good wharf with a crane for landing or shipping goods
4. A square of about 200 yards surrounded by pickets about 15 feet hi with 2 bastions
5. Each bastion has guns, four and 6 pounders & loopholes for musketry
6. Grand entrance is through a large double gate on the north side above which a sentry walks
7. On sentry walk above are swivels mounted.
8. As you enter the square is a 2 story house with 2 long 18 pounders in front of it on the south side
9. On the east is a range of low buildings where clerks have their apartments
10. In the same row stand the grand hall where the gentlemen assemble to dinner, etc.
11. On the same side are the houses for the men behind the 2 story or governors house

12. In the SW corner is the magazine well secured;
13. Along the west side stands a range of stores, tailor's shop, & Indian trading shop
14. In the SE corner the blacksmith's and cooper's shops
15. On the NE corner a granary for corn
16. In the NW corner stands a very high flag staff erected by the crew of the Columbia.
17. 150 men, most who have women cutting down wood and improving the fort
18. 200 acres were cleared and 20 acres planted to potatoes
19. There were 12 head of cattle, some pigs & goats, imported from California

Summary from Corney, added since 1813 were:

1. 2 story governor's house had been added since 1813
2. Several houses for the clerks
3. Additional stores
4. A tailor's shop
5. Granary for corn
6. Additional cannon

Spring of 1825 Inventory:

1 bull, 8 cows, 15 heifers, 2 calves, 77 horses, 4 hogs, large and small.

In November 1824 George Simpson arrived at Fort George. His description:

"A large pile of buildings covering about an acre of ground with an air of appearance of grandeur and consequence which does not become and is not at all suitable to an Indian trading post."

Early in 1825, Dr. Scouler said that the North West company had cleared about 80 acres of land

In Sept. 1825 Dr. Scouler said the site was abandoned by settlers

1825 Hudson's Bay Company left Fort George & Indians took the site over

In 1837 W.A. Slacum said the fort was burned after the departure of American ship *Ontario* in 1818 & others repeated him.

But Dr. McLoughlin said that the Indians took possession of it and in 1826 and 1827 pulled it down and burned it.

(so for about 4 years it was abandoned by whites.

Reoccupation of Fort George in 1829

In 1829 the Hudson's Bay Company again occupied Fort George and kept a man there.

In Feb. 1829 Capt. Dominis entered the river in the Boston Brig *Owhyhee*.

On March 10 the Convoy from Boston entered the Columbia



The Hudson's Bay Company became concerned and for this reason may have left a man there.

Donald Manson was left in charge of Fort George & had to live in a tent

The Hudson's Bay ship *William and Ann* struck on the spit at the mouth of the river and all were lost. Word didn't reach Fort Vancouver for 5 days.

Reasons to again have someone at Ft. George

1. Prevent Americans from settling there
2. Aid Hudson's Bay company people
3. Donald Manson was kept busy salting salmon

The American opposition erected a building there for trading in 1829. (People from the *Owhyhee* ship) and trading goods were landed there from the ship.

In May 1833, William Fraser Tolmie arrived at Ft. George as a surgeon for the Hudson's Bay company on their ship *Ganymede*. He reported:

Half a dozen Indian huts on the spot and about the same number of comfortable looking cottages.

Others say only about three buildings left

Summer of 1834, John K. Townsend reported:

Fort George – composed of only 1 principal house of hewn boards, and a number of small Indian huts surrounding it, only one white man there, valuable because

1. Can see river and vessels entering the river to give assistance  
Note: can see a chimney of the old fort still standing  
Apparently no agricultural activities

1837 Elijah White there with missionaries said:

Only three buildings there (a residence for the agent in charge of the post, 2 other houses built of logs and enclosed by rail fences.

1839 Sir Edward Belcher and Thomas J. Farnham in 1839 agree with White

1840 Rev. J. H. Frost said principal house was one story high and 60 feet long by 20 feet wide

1841 Mr. Birnie had put in a potato patch

1841 William Brackenridge says ground that had been cleared of timber was overgrown with brush except for a potato patch

1846 An inventory was made by James Douglas & Peter Skene Ogden of Hudson's Bay Company property. They said Ft. George had:

3 dwelling houses and 1 store, 2 acres of ground under cultivation (probably Birnies potatoes)

1846 Lieut. Neil Howison reported:

It has ten houses, including a warehouse, Indian lodges, a copper's and blacksmith's shop & no open ground except gardens. About 30 white people are there (not HB Co. people) and two lodges of Chinook Indians. This includes one white agent of the Hudson's Bay Company. A warehouse is in process of being built at Capt Disappointment. An American named Welch is claiming this site. Another portion including Pt. George is claimed by Colonel John McClure.

In 1849 at least one more house was built. Theodore Talbot recorded that the collector has just built him a frame house, one story with two rooms. Lots 25 x 100' were selling for \$200 a lot.

In 1850 Judge Strong said there were about 25 men both Upper and Lower Astoria except for the military and the custom house officials.



*Old Astoria*

lawyer. However that may be, the narrative continues as follows:

Then occurred something which must have set the little family a flutter and the town agog. The mail brought a letter from Hon. Daniel Webster, then secretary of state, announcing that on August 2, 1852, President Fillmore had appointed him a justice of the supreme court of the United States for the territory of Oregon. Now, great as was the compliment, the office carried with it the obligation of residence on the part of the appointee, and the territory of Oregon was a wilderness of forest, desert and mountains, inhabited by few save desperadoes and hostile Indians.

The author continues:

The prospect of such a trip, even if only as far as Chicago, with a wife and five children might well have given any man pause, but when there was added to it the vision of a journey by wagon over 2000 miles of wilderness, where he would have to spend the rest of his life among gamblers, cattle lifters and and Indians, the game seemed hardly worth the candle.

The appointment is said to have been made and confirmed by the senate without consultation with, or the approval of the appointee. The commission should have described the court as the supreme court of the territory of Oregon. The appointment, by its terms, was to take effect December 15, 1852, but was not declined until January 17, 1853, and in the meantime Webster had died, (October 24, 1852) and he had been succeeded by Edward Everett as secretary of state.

The author ventures the opinion that if his respected parent had accepted, he would have had to serve his own warrants, make his own arrests, enforce his own injunctions and act as his own hangman until the honest folk outnumbered the desperadoes.

Charles R. Train served in the Union army in the war between the states, and was subsequently elected attorney general of Massachusetts. So far as appears from the book, he never went to Oregon.

## DEVELOPMENT OF ASTORIA, 1811-1850

By GRACE P. MORRIS

THE COLUMBIA river, the great gateway into the interior of the Northwest coast, has occupied a prominent place in the history of the Northwest. The settlement at the mouth of the river has likewise had an interesting and colorful history. From the days of the first beginnings of fur trade down to the emergence of a seaport town in the middle of the last century the changing fortunes of this trading post challenged the interest of early travellers. From the records of these early travellers there emerged a fascinating story of the development of Astoria.

John Jacob Astor, with his dream of a great fur trade that might cover the entire United States, was the first to build an enduring post for trade at the mouth of the Columbia. Just when the suggestion of a fort at the mouth of the Columbia began to assume prominence in Astor's mind is not definitely known. The idea of a trading post on the great Columbia does not belong uniquely to Astor although Porter, in his splendid biography of Astor, thinks that he might have developed it independently of others. Porter thinks that it is more likely, however, that the credit belongs to Astor's friend, patron and occasional partner, Alexander Henry of Montreal. Henry as early as the spring of 1796 had written to a New York merchant, Mr. Edgar, advising the building of forts on the rivers of the Northwest coast for the purpose of trade with the Indians.

The final arrangements for establishing a trading post on the Pacific coast were concluded by Astor on June 23, 1810, in New York. On September 6, 1810, the ship *Tonquin* set sail from New York for the far distant Columbia to establish the trading enterprise.

After a difficult voyage, the *Tonquin* finally reached the Columbia the latter part of March, 1811. The best descriptions of the beginnings of the establishment come from the pens of two men who came to help establish the trade, Gabriel Franchere and Alexander Ross.

It was no easy task to select a site for a trading post, and Alexander Ross recorded a vivid picture of the difficulties encountered in choosing a site and erecting the buildings.



For some days much time was spent in examining both sides of the inlet with the view of choosing a suitable place to build on, but at last it was settled that the new establishment should be erected on the south side, on a small rising ground situated between Point George on the west and Tongue Point on the east, distant twelve miles from the mouth of the inlet or bay . . . . . From the site of the establishment the eye could wander over a varied and interesting scene. The extensive sound, with its rocky shores, lay in front; the breakers on the bar, rolling in wild confusion, closed the view on the west; on the east the country as far as the Sound had a wild and varied aspect, while towards the south the impervious and magnificent forest darkened the landscape as far as eye could reach. The place thus selected for the emporium of the West might challenge the whole continent to produce a spot of equal extent presenting more difficulties to the settler: studded with gigantic trees of almost incredible size, many of them measuring fifty feet in girth and so close together, and intermingled with huge rocks, as to make it a work of no ordinary labor to level and clear the ground . . . . . There is an art in felling a tree as well as in planting one, but unfortunately none of us had learned that art and hours together would be spent in conjectures and discussions, one calling out that it would fall here; another, there; in short, there were as many opinions as there were individuals about it . . . . .

On the fourth day after landing we planted some potatoes and sowed a few garden seed and on the 16th of May we laid the foundations of our first building. . . . On the 18th as soon as the foundation was finished, the establishment was named Astoria in honor of Astor, the projector of the enterprise.<sup>1</sup>

The first buildings, a store house, a dwelling and a powder magazine, were constructed of "hewn logs and in the absence of boards, tightly covered and roofed with cedar bark."<sup>2</sup>

The mighty trees of the forests of Oregon had presented a problem in clearing a site for the settlement, but by the middle of July another problem loomed large to the little party of men—a human problem. The Indians had been very much interested in the activities of the white men and had camped about the spot in large numbers. Toward the middle of July they began to withdraw, and the men of the Astor party learned through a friendly secondary chief that since a number of the men had left on a trading expedition, the Indians thought that they

<sup>1</sup>Alexander Ross, *Adventures of the First Settlers on the Oregon or Columbia River*, Edited, M. M. Quaife (1923) 76, 77, 79, 80, 88.

<sup>2</sup>Gabriel Franchere, *Narrative of a Voyage to the Northwest Coast of America in the years 1811, 1812, 1813 and 1814 or the First American Settlement on the Pacific*, Translated from 1819 French edition and edited by J. V. Huntington (1854) 118.

could kill the remaining members of the group and plunder the post. It was no longer sufficient to plan to build merely a trading post but defensive steps had to be taken. From Franchere we can get a clear idea of the efforts to defend the little post.

The dwelling house was raised, parallel to the warehouse; we cut a great quantity of pickets in the forest, and formed a square, with palisades in front and rear of about ninety feet by one-hundred and twenty; the warehouse, built on the edge of a ravine, formed one flank, the dwelling house and shops the other; with a little bastion at each angle north and south, on which were mounted four small cannon. The whole was finished in six days, and had a sufficiently formidable aspect to deter the Indians from attacking us; and for greater surety, we organized a guard for day and night.<sup>3</sup>

Still another difficulty presented itself to the amateur carpenters. Franchere said that the mason work gave them concern for they were unable to make lime for the want of lime stones. Finally, however, a solution was found and blue clay was used for the mortar.<sup>4</sup>

During the first year a number of buildings were completed. Ross Cox and Robert Stuart both indicate in their descriptions that a dwelling house, extensive warehouses for trading goods and furs, a provision store, a trading shop, smith's forge, and carpenter's workshop, had been erected. On June 29, 1812, Robert Stuart entered a description of these new buildings and his record is as follows:

Our present fortification in place of being one hundred and twenty square yards in extent, as was at first projected, is only about seventy-five by eighty feet; it is well stockaded with pickets seventeen feet long and eighteen inches in diameter, having two strong bastions, at opposite angles, so as to rake two sides each; inside are a frame store two stories high, sixty feet by thirty, with good cellars and a powder magazine, a dwelling house, one story high and sixty feet by twenty-five, a blacksmith's shop, and a large shed for carpenters, coopers, etc. The ensuing winter about twenty men are to be employed in extending the fortification, and thirty are now engaged in preparing a frame for a dwelling house, to be two stories high and sixty by thirty feet, which with another store and kitchen shall be the principal additions made to the present buildings.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Ibid 123, 124

<sup>4</sup>Ibid 129

<sup>5</sup>*The Discovery of the Oregon Trail*, Robert Stuart's Narrative, etc., Edited by P. A. Rollins (1935) 4.



In August and September of 1812 a house forty-five by thirty feet was finished. This was used as a hospital for the sick and lodging house for the mechanics.<sup>6</sup>

Such were the splendid beginnings made by the Pacific Fur Company. Astor's dream of a great emporium for trade on the far Western coast was indeed taking form. Then came the War of 1812 and with it difficult days for the trading post upon the Columbia. In October, 1813, an agreement was signed by Duncan McDougall for the Pacific Fur Company, and McTavish on behalf of the North West Company of Canada, and the property on the Columbia passed into the hands of the North West Company. The *Raccoon*, a British sloop of war, on December 13 took formal possession of the establishment and the country for Great Britain, and changed the name of Astoria to Fort George.

In the years that followed under the leadership of the North West Company additions were made and Fort George enjoyed years of growth and prosperity. These were the days of the glory of the frontier post, and the pile of buildings which constituted the fort and trading enterprise presented quite an air of grandeur amid the tractless forests of the Oregon country. Buildings were added and the fortifications were increased. From the pen of Peter Corney, who served as first officer on the ship *Columbia* which made several trading excursions to the Pacific coast, comes an excellent description of Fort George at this period. He spent the months of October and November in 1817 at the Fort and was thoroughly familiar with conditions there. His description follows:

The North West Company's establishment lies about seven miles from Point Adams on the south side of the river, above a small bay, where ships are in great safety out of the strength of the tide. There is a very good wharf with a crane for landing or shipping goods. The settlement is a square of about 200 yards, surrounded by pickets about fifteen feet high and protected by two bastions, one on the southwest and the other on the northeast corner. Each of these bastions mounts light guns, four and six pounders, and there are loopholes for musketry. The grand entrance is through a large double gate on the north side, above which there is a platform for the sentry to walk. On this are several swivels mounted. As you enter

<sup>6</sup>Franchere, op. cit. 161, 162.

the fort or square there is a two story house with two long eighteen pounders in front of it on the south side; on the east is a range of low buildings, where the clerks have their apartments, and in the same row stands the grand hall where the gentlemen assemble to dinner, etc. The houses for the men are on the same side, and behind the two story or governor's house; in the southwest corner is the magazine well secured; along the west side stands a range of stores, tailor's shop, and Indian trading shop; in the southeast corner the blacksmith's and cooper's shops; and on the northeast corner a granary for corn. In the northwest corner stands a very high flag staff erected by the crew of the *Columbia*. The whole of the settlers do not exceed one hundred and fifty men, most of whom keep Indian women . . . They are constantly employed in cutting down the wood and improving the fort.<sup>7</sup>

From this account it is evident that the two story governor's house had been added since 1813, several houses for the clerks, additional stores, a tailor's shop and a granary for corn. Additional cannon had also been provided for protection.

In 1821 the North West Company was united with the Hudson's Bay Company, and in 1824 George Simpson, governor of the Hudson's Bay Company in America, came to the Columbia to supervise changes that were to be made and inaugurate new policies. He arrived at the famous Fort George on November 8, 1824. He described Fort George "as a large pile of buildings covering about an acre of ground," and with "an air of appearance of grandeur and consequence which does not become and is not at all suitable to an Indian trading post."<sup>8</sup> These comments foreshadow the beginning of the end for the flourishing post upon the Columbia. Its days of "consequence and grandeur" seem to be over.

It is interesting to note the beginnings of agriculture in these early days. No doubt the first agricultural activities in Oregon were near this spot for Capt. Charles Bishop of the *Ruby*, which entered the Columbia on May 22, 1795, planted a garden on a nearby island. The crew was set to work at once clearing a patch and "peas, beans, potatoes, several peach stones, radishes,

<sup>7</sup>Peter Corney, *Voyages in the Northern Pacific—Narrative of Several Trading Voyages from 1813-1818—Between the Northwest Coast of America, the Hawaiian Islands and China, etc.*,—Reprinted from the *London Literary Gazette* of 1821 (1896) 79A-80A.

<sup>8</sup>*Fur Trade and Empire, George Simpson's Journal 1824-1825*, Edited by Frederick Merk (1931) 65.



mustard, cress and celery were planted." From this planting was gathered a good crop of potatoes, "rich and flowry," and a few beans.<sup>9</sup>

One of the early acts of the men of Astor's company was to start a garden. Alexander Ross said that on "the fourth day after landing we planted some potatoes and sowed a few garden seed."<sup>10</sup> Franchere says that only twelve potatoes were saved during the passage and these were so shrivelled up that they despaired of raising any. However, from these few potatoes planted in 1811 came a yield of 190 potatoes and five bushels were secured the second year. In 1813, fifty bushels of potatoes were grown. Franchere also reports that one turnip from the garden measured thirty-three inches in circumference and weighed fifteen and one-half pounds.<sup>11</sup> Peter Corney reported that in 1817, 200 acres were cleared and twenty acres were planted to potatoes.<sup>12</sup> Dr. Scouler, who visited the spot early in 1825, estimated that the North West Company had cleared about eighty acres of land.<sup>13</sup> When the difficulty of clearing the land is recalled it seems as if Dr. Scouler's estimate might be more accurate. Astor's ship *Tonquin* also attempted to bring livestock to the far Western coast. Franchere says that they took on board at the Sandwich Islands a hundred head of live hogs, some goats, two sheep, and a quantity of poultry.<sup>14</sup> Several days before reaching the Columbia a violent storm broke, and according to the statements of Alexander Ross the livestock were either killed or washed overboard.<sup>15</sup> Franchere, however, tells of building a pen, soon after reaching the mouth of the Columbia, and placing fifty hogs in the pen.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>9</sup>F. W. Howay, *Early Followers of Captain Gray*. *Washington Historical Quarterly* XVIII, (January 1927) 14.

<sup>10</sup>Ross, op. cit. 88.

<sup>11</sup>Franchere, op. cit. 231.

<sup>12</sup>Corney, op. cit. 81A.

<sup>13</sup>Dr. John Scouler, *Journal of a Voyage to Northwest America—Oregon Historical Quarterly* VI, (June 1905) 166.

<sup>14</sup>Franchere op. cit. 81.

<sup>15</sup>Ross op. cit. 58.

<sup>16</sup>Franchere op. cit. 98.

No doubt part of the livestock was washed overboard, but apparently quite a number actually reached Astoria.

A drove of sixty hogs came on the ship *Beaver* in 1812. We know that in March, 1814 there were two goats at the trading post for Alexander Henry reported that they had the milk of two goats.<sup>17</sup> When the North West Company's ship, the *Isaac Todd*, arrived in April of the same year two young bulls and two heifers which were brought from San Francisco were landed.<sup>18</sup> From Peter Corney we learn that the livestock industry did not develop rapidly. He reported that in 1817 there were about twelve head of cattle with some pigs and goats, imported from California. He remarked that the stock did not increase for "want of proper care, the wolves often carrying off goats and pigs."<sup>19</sup> An inventory of property at the fort made in the spring of 1821 lists one bull, 8 cows, 15 heifers, 2 calves, 77 horses, 4 hogs, large and small.

George Simpson, after expressing disapproval of the pretentious beginnings at the mouth of the Columbia, proceeded to move the central establishment farther up the river and called the new post Fort Vancouver. During the year 1825 the Hudson's Bay Company left Fort George and according to the statement of Dr. McLoughlin the Indians took possession of the spot. Dr. Scouler, who came to the Columbia in 1825 as ship surgeon on the Hudson's Bay Company's vessel, the *William and Ann*, was at Fort George in September and told of the desertion of the post by the white men. He says that upon landing they "found it entirely abandoned by the settlers and taken possession of by the Indians who were rapidly reducing it to a state of ruin and filth."<sup>20</sup>

A mistaken idea has prevailed as to the burning of the abandoned post. W. A. Slacum, who visited the Northwest coast in 1837 and made a report, stated that the Fort was burned shortly after the departure of the American ship *Ontario* in

<sup>17</sup>*New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest, The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and David Thompson, 1799-1814*, Edited by Elliott Coues 1897) II, 869.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid*, II, 895.

<sup>19</sup>Corney op. cit. 81A.

<sup>20</sup>Scouler op. cit. (Sept. 1905) 277.



1818. Other writers merely followed Slacum's statement and the impression was spread. Dr. McLoughlin said that the Hudson's Bay Company left it in the spring of 1825 when the Indians took possession of it and in 1826 and 1827 pulled it down and burned it. So Fort George was abandoned, reduced to a state of ruin and filth and finally burned by the Indians. For a period of about four years it was unoccupied by white people.

It was evidently in 1829 that the Hudson's Bay Company again occupied Fort George and kept a man there. In February of that year the Boston Brig *Owhyhee* commanded by Captain Dominis entered the river. On March 10 the *Convoy*, also from Boston, sailed into the Columbia. The Hudson's Bay Company was much concerned with the prospects of opposition in the trading and began to lay plans to meet it. It was perhaps a part of these plans to place a man at old Fort George to watch the ships that entered the river. On March 28 of that year Dr. McLoughlin wrote a letter to Donald Manson instructing him as to methods of dealing with the opposition in the river. This letter contained no address but was no doubt sent to Fort George. Letters written to Donald Manson in August, 1829, were addressed to Fort George which would indicate that Mr. Manson was the man placed in charge of the newly opened post. Bancroft says that when the American opposition entered the river Donald Manson was sent to occupy the deserted post and oppose the interlopers. He states that Mr. Manson was forced to live in a tent for some time which would indicate the ruinous state of the old Fort.<sup>21</sup>

Another incident occurred early in the year 1829 which would furnish an additional reason for occupying Fort George once more. On March 10 the Hudson's Bay Company's ship, the *William and Ann*, struck on the spit at the mouth of the river. Captain Swan and all of the crew, twenty-six persons, were lost. Word of the wreck reached Fort Vancouver on March 15. Apparently no one was located at the mouth of the river at that date, but by March 28 Donald Manson must have been sent to rebuild the Fort. It was desirable not only to watch the opposition but to render aid to vessels entering the river.

<sup>21</sup>H. H. Bancroft, *History of Oregon* (1886) I, 40.

Yet another reason for interest in Fort George may be found in letters which Dr. McLoughlin wrote to Donald Manson under dates of August 18, 1829 and October 18, 1829. In these letters he asked that an account of the number of salmon salted be sent to him.

In addition to the activities of the Hudson's Bay Company in rebuilding Fort George in 1829, the American opposition also erected a building near Fort George for trading purposes. The mate and some of the crew of the *Owhyhee* were set ashore in August to build a house. When the building was completed, "the trading goods were landed for Captain Thompson and the brig continued up the river."<sup>22</sup>

The year 1829, then, marks the reoccupation of Fort George and a revival of activity there. Some years elapse before it is possible to secure a first hand description of the Fort after it was rebuilt. William Fraser Tolmie, a physician who was sent to the West coast as a surgeon on the Hudson's Bay Company's ship *Ganymede*, arrived in Oregon in May, 1833. He indicated in his comments that there were about a half a dozen Indian huts on the spot and "about the same number of comfortable looking cottages."<sup>23</sup> Dr. Tolmie was probably mistaken in noting that there were about a half dozen small houses for most of the subsequent reports indicate that there were in all about three buildings. John K. Townsend, a well-known Philadelphia physician and naturalist, joined Nathaniel J. Wyeth's second expedition to the Oregon country and reached the Columbia in the summer of 1834. Since he recorded a very interesting description of the rebuilt post and commented also on the use to which it was put, his description is quoted in full here.

On the afternoon of the 8th, we anchored off Fort George, as it is called, although perhaps it scarcely deserves the name of a fort, being composed of but one principal house of hewn boards, and a number of small Indian huts surrounding it, presenting the appearance, from a distance, of an ordinary small farm house with its appropriate out buildings. There is but one white man residing here, the superintendent of the Fort; but there is probably no necessity for more, as the business done

<sup>22</sup>F. W. Howay, *The Brig Owhyhee in the Columbia 1829-30, Oregon Historical Quarterly* XXXV, (March 1934) 14.

<sup>23</sup>*Journal of William Fraser Tolmie, 1833, Washington Historical Quarterly* III, (July 1912) 231.



is not very considerable, most of the furs being taken by the Indians to Vancouver. The establishment is, however, of importance, independent of its utility as a trading post, as it is situated within view of the dangerous cape, and intelligence of the arrival of vessels can be communicated to the authorities at Vancouver in time for them to render adequate assistance to such vessels by supplying them with pilots, etc. This is the spot where once stood the fort established by the direction of our honored countryman, John Jacob Astor. One of the chimneys of old Fort Astoria is still standing, a melancholy monument of American enterprise and domestic misrule. The spot where once the fine parterre overlooked the river and the bold stockade enclosed the neat and substantial fort is now overgrown with weeds and bushes, and can scarce be distinguished from the primeval forest which surrounds it on every side.<sup>24</sup>

From this account it is evident that agricultural activities had been allowed to decline and that no steps had been taken to carry on these efforts. Dr. Elijah White, who came to the country in 1837 with a party of missionaries, indicated very definitely that there were but three buildings at Fort George. These consisted of a residence for the agent in charge of the post and two other houses built of logs and enclosed by rail fences.<sup>25</sup> Descriptions of the spot by Sir Edward Belcher and Thomas J. Farnham in 1839 bear out the facts given by Dr. White.

Rev. J. H. Frost, who came in 1840, stated that the principal house was one story high and sixty feet long by twenty feet wide.<sup>26</sup>

By 1841 a little agricultural activity had been revived in the form of a fine patch of potatoes which the agent, Mr. Birnie, had planted. William Brackenridge, a horticulturist with the Wilkes expedition of that year, mentioned in his journal that the ground which had been cleared of timber was all "overgrown with brush, save a small patch which produces, Mr. Birnie says, very fine potatoes."<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup>John K. Townsend, *Narrative of a Journey Across the Rocky Mountains to the Columbia River, etc.* (1839) Reprinted in *Early Western Travels* edited by Reuben Gold Thwaites (1905) XXI, 311.

<sup>25</sup>*Ten Years in Oregon, Travels and Adventures of Doctor E. White and Lady West of the Rocky Mountains, etc.* Compiled by Miss A. J. Allen (1850) 56.

<sup>26</sup>Daniel Lee and J. H. Frost, *Ten Years in Oregon.* (1844) 223.

<sup>27</sup>*Our First Official Horticulturist, The Brackenridge Journal*, edited by O. B. Sperlin, *Washington Historical Quarterly* XXII, (April 1931) 139.

Other visitors in the following years, Duflot de Mofras, Lansford W. Hastings, Warre and Vavasour, Joel Palmer and others, indicate little or no change in the spot.

Following the treaty of June 15, 1846, in which the Oregon boundary question was settled, an inventory of the Hudson's Bay Company's property was made by James Douglas and Peter Skene Ogden. This inventory listed three dwelling houses and one store at Fort George with a total valuation of 671 pounds. There were also listed two acres of ground under cultivation which was probably Mr. Birnie's potato patch.<sup>28</sup>

Changes were beginning to take place by 1846 and other white men beside those of the Hudson's Bay Company were making the beginnings of a settlement at the river's mouth. A few buildings were added by newcomers and old Astoria was on the way to a new significance as a flourishing seaport. Lieutenant Neil Howison, who visited the old Fort in 1846, saw not only remains of an old settlement but also the beginnings of a new Astoria.

Besides Fort Vancouver six sites have been selected for towns; of these Astoria takes precedence in age only. It is situated on the left bank of the Columbia, thirteen miles from the sea; it contains ten houses, including a warehouse, Indian lodges, a copper's and blacksmith's shop; it has no open ground except gardens within less than a mile of it. It may be considered in a state of transition exhibiting the wretched remains of a by-gone settlement, and the uncouth germ of a new one. About thirty white people live here, and two lodges of Chinook Indians. The Hudson's Bay Company has still an agent here, but was about transferring him over to a warehouse it is putting up at Cape Disappointment. A preemption right to the principal part of this site is claimed by an American named Welch; the other portion, including Point George, is claimed in like manner by Colonel John McClure.<sup>29</sup>

From this account it would appear that there were about nine buildings aside from the four which belonged to the Hudson's Bay Company, and that thirty persons other than Hudson's Bay Company clerks had settled at the spot.

By 1849 at least one more house had been built, for Theodore

<sup>28</sup>T. C. Elliott, *British Values in Oregon, Oregon Historical Quarterly* XXXII, (March 1931) 41.

<sup>29</sup>Lieutenant Neil M. Howison, *Report on Oregon 1846, Oregon Historical Quarterly* XIV, (March 1913) 41, 42.



Talbot recorded in his journal that the "collector has just built him a frame house, one story with two rooms."<sup>30</sup> From the same source we learn that town lots twenty-five by one hundred feet deep were selling freely for \$200 a lot.

The little settlement at this period was divided into upper and lower towns, between which there was great rivalry. The upper town was known to the people of lower Astoria as Adairville. The lower town was designated by its rival as Old Fort George or McClure's Astoria. According to Judge Strong, who passed through in 1850, "a road between the two places would have weakened the differences of both, isolation being the protection of either." Judge Strong estimated that there were about twenty-five men in both towns, excepting of course the military men stationed there and the custom house officials.<sup>31</sup>

Thus in forty years, starting with the dreams of a great fur trading emporium, Astoria moved through shifting fortunes and finally emerged as a seacoast town.

<sup>30</sup>The Journals of Theodore Talbot, 1843 and 1849-52. Edited with notes by Charles H. Carey (1931) 86, 87.

<sup>31</sup>William Strong, The Annual Address. *Transactions of the Sixth Annual Re-union of the Oregon Pioneer Association for 1878*. 19.

## THE CHAMPOEG MEETING OF MARCH 4, 1844

By J. NEILSON BARRY

ON THE evening of March 4th, 1844, there was a scrimmage at Oregon City in which the Indian Cockstock was killed, and three Americans wounded, George W. LeBreton and a Mr. Rogers subsequently died from their wounds. This created great excitement in the Willamette Valley, and led to the organization of a military company. These matters caused a meeting of settlers which had been held earlier in the day of March 4th, 1844 to be disregarded in most contemporary records. If any minutes were made, they seem to have been lost. Fortunately Robert C. Clark unearthed a petition to Congress<sup>1</sup> which had been presented to this meeting, and the names of the officers of that meeting show that the French petition for a more simple form of local government was presented to the same meeting. It may, therefore, be of value to review the fragmentary data and try to reconstruct the circumstances.

Dr. John McLoughlin, in his annual report, March 20, 1843, wrote of the meeting,<sup>2</sup> which was held at Oregon City March 17, 1843, by the committee appointed at the second Wolf Meeting, March 6th, 1843. It was an open public meeting, at which about fifty Americans were present.<sup>3</sup> He wrote: Paragraph

<sup>1</sup>Robert C. Clark, *History of the Willamette Valley*, Chicago, (1927) p. 270, note.

<sup>2</sup>The meetings were (1) winter of 1842-3, Oregon City, approval of a government independent of the United States, (2) Oregon City, agreement to wait four years. (3) January 1843, secret meeting at Salem, Oregon. (4) First Wolf Meeting, February 2, 1843. (5) Second Wolf Meeting, March 6, 1843, Committee appointed to consider organization. (6) Oregon City, March 17, 1843, decision for a temporary government, and the committee authorized to call a meeting at Champoeg. (7) Champoeg, May 2, 1843. Committee appointed to draft laws. (8) Methodist Mission, May 16-19, 1843. Meetings of the committee preparing proposed code. (9) June 27, 1843, Committee completed proposed code. (10) July 5, 1843, settlers acted as first legislative body, and established the second form of local government. Voluminous references may be found in the *Washington Historical Quarterly* Vol. 25, April 1934, pp. 138-147, with some quotations not elsewhere available.

<sup>3</sup>Gustavus Hines, in well-known book with different titles to the many editions, pp. 422-3. W. H. Gray, *History of Oregon*, Portland Oregon, (1870), p. 268.